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SUBJECT: ISLAMIC PARTIES FAIL TO CATCH UP

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1B. 08 JAKARTA 0888 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: Ambassador Cameron Hume for reasons 1.4 (b+d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Islamic-oriented parties' support declined in April 9 parliamentary elections, with quick count results indicating they received only a combined 28 percent of the vote. These results represented a 10-point drop from the previous two national elections. Internal divisions, corruption allegations, and even polygamy claims hurt these parties' popularity. Mostly, however, this vote proved that voters care more about bread-and-butter issues than they do about moral and religious ones. Islamic-based parties are nevertheless poised to play an important role in coalition-building with the larger, secular parties for upcoming July Presidential elections. PKS is not likely to receive the vice presidential nod from President Yudhoyono, but will likely remain in his cabinet. END SUMMARY.

ISLAMIC-BASED PARTY SUPPORT ON THE DECLINE

¶2. (C) Declining support for Islamic-oriented parties in the April 9 elections was due primarily to the secular views of the 87-90% of Indonesian voters who are Muslim. Pre-election polls showed that Indonesians overwhelmingly care more about social and economic issues (78 percent) versus a religious agenda (0.8 percent). Historically, Islamic parties peaked in the country's first democratic elections of 1955, reaching 44% of the vote, but declined over the years reaching a low of 16 percent in 1971. Islamic parties surged in 1999 elections, with 38.6% of the vote, due to gains by two Muslim-based parties, National Awakening Party (PKB) and National Mandate Party (PAN), two parties which espouse largely secular platforms and helped to lead the democratic "reformasi" movement. Dramatic gains by Prosperous Justice Party (PKS) in 2004 kept Islamic party support at 38.5%. Still, PKS did well that year on a platform of clean government and social welfare, rather than Islamic values.

¶3. (C) Thus, the electoral support for Islamic-based parties is weak. In fact, PKB and PAN are reluctant to identify themselves as Islamic and the issues they promote are secular in nature. Excluding vote for these two parties and counting only the support for parties with a more Islamic agenda, electoral strength of Islamic parties dropped to only 13-14% of the vote in 2009. Besides the practical, secular nature of Indonesian people, there were a number of other factors affecting the decline in popularity of the Islamic-oriented parties: internal divisions, corruption and policies outside the mainstream.

LOSING MOMENTUM

¶4. (U) Indonesia's Islamic-oriented parties--PAN, PKB, United Development Party (PPP), Star Reform Party (PBR), Crescent Star Party (PBB), and National Sun Party (PMB)--all lost support during April 9 parliamentary elections, the one exception being the largest Islamic-oriented party PKS, which gained some ground over 2004. Still, PKS' 8.3 percent was a big disappointment to party leaders, which at one point a

year ago hoped to get 20 percent of the vote; most observers projected PKS to get 12-15%. In fact, three of the parties (PBR, PBB, PMB) appear unlikely to make the parliamentary threshold of 2.5 percent--which means they would not hold seats in parliament.

Islamic-based parties results in 2004 versus quick count results in 2009:

The United Development Party (PPP) 2004 (11 %) vs. 2009 (5.4 %). The National Mandate Party (PAN) 2004 (9 %) vs. 2009 (6.3 %). The National Awakening Party (PKB) 2004 (9 %) vs. 2009 (5.1 %). The Prosperous Justice Party (PKS) 2004 (8 %) vs. 2009 (8.3 %). The Star Reform Party (PBR) 2004 (2 %) vs. 2009 (1.1 %). The Crescent Star Party (PBB) 2004 (2 %) vs. 2009 (1.9 %). The National Sun Party (PMB) 2004 (0) vs. 2009 (0.4 %).

Total Percentage Of Vote: 2004 (41 %) vs. 2009 (28.5 %)

PKS STRUGGLES TO DEFINE ITSELF

¶6. (C) PKS is struggling between defining itself as an Islamic movement or a political party. According to PKS Legislator Zulkieflimansyah, the older, more conservative party founders see PKS as an Islamic movement with aspirations to turn Indonesia into an Islamic State. However, the younger, more religiously moderate leaders--and those currently holding seats in the national parliament--want to move the party towards the middle.

¶7. (SBU) PKS arguably has been most damaged by chinks in its carefully burnished clean and professional image. Several of its legislative candidates were recently accused of corruption. Rama Pratama, candidate from the East Jakarta district and member of the budget committee in Parliament, is suspected of corruption over infrastructure development stimulus funds for ports in Sulawesi, allegations he denies. Also, legislative candidate Ikhsan Mokoginta was imprisoned for six months for campaigning near a mosque.

¶8. (SBU) PKS's moral stances also put Indonesia's tolerant majority on edge. PKS' staunch support for the recently passed anti-pornography law--which many Indonesians saw as a threat to civil liberties--and the inclusion of four of its legislative candidates on a recently published polygamy list, also hurt the party's appeal to Indonesia's moderate mainstream. Although Indonesia allows polygamy, it is generally frowned upon and is banned for civil servants, police and army. (Note: There are candidates from the secular parties also included in the recently published list.) Polygamy also was a turn off for female voters and this was reflected at the polls.

INFIGHTING AFFECTING THE SMALLER ISLAMIC PARTIES

¶9. (SBU) PKS is not alone in its internal rifts. PPP, PAN, and PKB also are split following the April 9 election results--divisions that severely hampered their ability to attract voters. PPP, which went from 11 percent in 2004 to 5.4 percent in the recent election, is fracturing over public bickering between Party Chair Suryadharma Ali and Advisory board Chair Bachtiar Chamsyah. Suryadharma is urging the party to back a coalition bent on challenging the status quo. Chamsyah supports remaining in a coalition with President Yudhoyono's Partai Demokrat (PD).

¶10. (C) PAN also is divided between President Yudhoyono and the opposition. Party provincial leaders are calling for a coalition with President Yudhoyono, while PAN National Chair Sutrisno Bachir claims the party will likely support the opposition. Hatta Rajasa PAN member and current State Secretary, is a possible contender for President Yudhoyono's vice presidential slot.

¶11. (SBU) In 2008, Muhaman Iskandar won a power-struggle for control of the PKB over the party's charismatic patron, former President Abdurrahman Wahid (aka "Gus Dur"). This

public rift has devastated the party. Quick count results indicate the party won 5.1 percent in the recent parliamentary elections, down from 9 percent in 2004.
(reftel)

CRUCIAL ROLE OF ISLAMIC PARTIES IN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS

¶112. (SBU) Despite the decline of Islamic-oriented parties--with three likely to fail to win seats--these parties could play a role as key members of a coalition in the upcoming presidential election scheduled for July. Although President Yudhoyono's PD currently has a decisive victory with over 20 percent of the vote, it will need to form a coalition to govern effectively. Although it is too soon to tell which of the smaller parties will support President Yudhoyono, PKS and PKB appear eager to remain in President Yudhoyono's coalition, with PAN and PPP perhaps also joining.

HUME